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BENNETT INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO BUILD NEW NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM IN UTAH

New home necessary to preserve invaluable artifacts and treasures of the West

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As the 107th Congress begins its legislative activities for the year, Senator Bob Bennett (R-Utah) today introduced a bill to authorize design and construction of a new Utah Museum of Natural History, to be built at the University of Utah's Research Park.

"The current home of the Museum of Natural History was once the library where I studied as a student at the University of Utah," Bennett said. "While I have fond memories of the time I spent in the library back then, it is unfit to house the treasures of the museum today.

"The collection of the museum is unique and remarkable. Since a substantial portion of it includes federally-owned treasures from Utah's public lands, which tell the natural and cultural story of the history of the West, it is appropriate that the federal government participate in the responsible preservation of these artifacts."

The Utah Public Lands Artifact Preservation Act of 2001, which Bennett introduced today, will authorize up to \$15 million toward the new museum's design and construction. In October Bennett secured a federal down-payment in the form of a \$500,000 grant for museum construction costs which were included in the bill funding the Department of Housing and Urban Development for Fiscal Year 2001.

On announcement of the \$500,000 grant by Bennett, the Emma Eccles Jones Foundation announced its own contribution of up to \$10 million toward the effort and noted that since the federal government will cover only about one-quarter of the project's total cost, private contributions will be necessary for its completion.

Bennett noted some of the museum's treasures, items that stand out in the collection because of their uniqueness or regional historic importance. Particularly impressive are the one-of-a-kind 150-million-year-old Allosaurus skull and brain from the Cleveland Lloyd Quarry in Eastern Utah, an almost 1000-year-old Native American moccasin from Box Elder County, and the Nelson's Globe Mallow from South-Eastern Utah, the oldest herbarium species ever to be germinated.

The museum's current location, the George Thomas building, was initially constructed in 1932 and served for many years as the university's library. The building's size and configuration restrict what can be displayed from the museum's vast collection, now consisting of over one million items of geological, biological, archaeological, zoological, and paleontological significance. Recognizing the need for a new building, the university has developed a museum master plan and set aside 14 acres in the Emigration Visitors District.

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